



Southeast Fishery Bulletin

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AUTHORIZED USE OF RESTRICTED TOW TIMES FOR SHRIMP TRAWLERS IN ALABAMA, MISSISSIPPI, AND LOUISIANA WATERS OUT TO 20 NAUTICAL MILES

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) announces it will publish in the *Federal Register* a temporary authorization affecting shrimp trawlers who are required to use turtle excluder devices (TEDs) off Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. This authorization will allow shrimp trawlers in the affected areas to continue to use restricted tow times instead of TEDs. This authorization is necessary due to the ongoing special environmental conditions caused by excessive amounts of debris left by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

NMFS received requests from the affected states' marine resources managers requesting extensions to previous authorizations because their investigations indicated that the persistence of excessive amounts of storm-related debris on the shrimping grounds was causing TEDs to become clogged and ineffective.

This authorization is now in effect in inshore and offshore waters affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita from the Florida/Alabama border, westward to the Louisiana/Texas border, and offshore 20 nautical miles, and is valid until 11:59 p.m. on January 23, 2006.

In these areas, shrimp trawlers can trawl without TEDs but must limit their tow times to 75 minutes. Tow times are measured from the time the trawl doors enter the water until they are removed from the water.

This authorization extends the previous authorization encompassing waters from the Florida/Alabama border, westward to the boundary shared by Matagorda and Brazoria Counties, Texas, and offshore 20 nautical miles due to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, which is in effect through December 23, 2005. Due to the reported decrease of storm-related debris in Texas waters, this authorization does not include the areas of Texas waters included in the previous authorization.

NMFS encourages shrimp trawlers in the affected areas to continue to use TEDs if possible, even though they are authorized under this action to use restricted tow times. NMFS' studies have shown that the problem of clogging by seagrass, algae, or by other debris is not

unique to TED-equipped nets. When fishermen trawl in problem areas, they may experience clogging with or without TEDs. Shrimp trawlers who continue to use legal TEDs in the affected areas do not have to limit their tow times. However, shrimpers choosing to use tow-time limitations may not simply sew the TED flaps shut; they must remove the TEDs from the trawls.

NMFS will continue to monitor this situation. If monitoring indicates that debris is no longer a problem, then this authorization will be shortened. If debris continues to be a problem after the dates above, this authorization may be extended. Fishermen should monitor NOAA weather radio for announcements. They may also contact the NMFS Southeast Regional Office at the phone number above for updated information.

NOAA Fisheries Service is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources and their habitats through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries Service provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners and nearly 60 countries to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes.

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